MARSHALL ISLANDS WOMEN;

A STUDY OF FIRST GENERATION

UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

1965 -1985

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IN

PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES

By

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Prepared for the Center for Pacific Islands Studies
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JAPAN
Tokyo
Midway
International Dateline
30°N
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Wake
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Yap
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PALAU
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MICRONESIA
Gilbert Islands
Tarawa
NAURU
Banaba
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North Pacific Ocean
Clipperton
Kiritimati
Line Islands
Phoenix Islands
equator
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equator
TOKELAU
TUVALU
COOK ISLANDS
Marquesas Islands
FRENCH POLYNESIA
New Ireland
Bougainville
SOLOMON ISLANDS
IRIAN
AYA
PAPUA NEW GU
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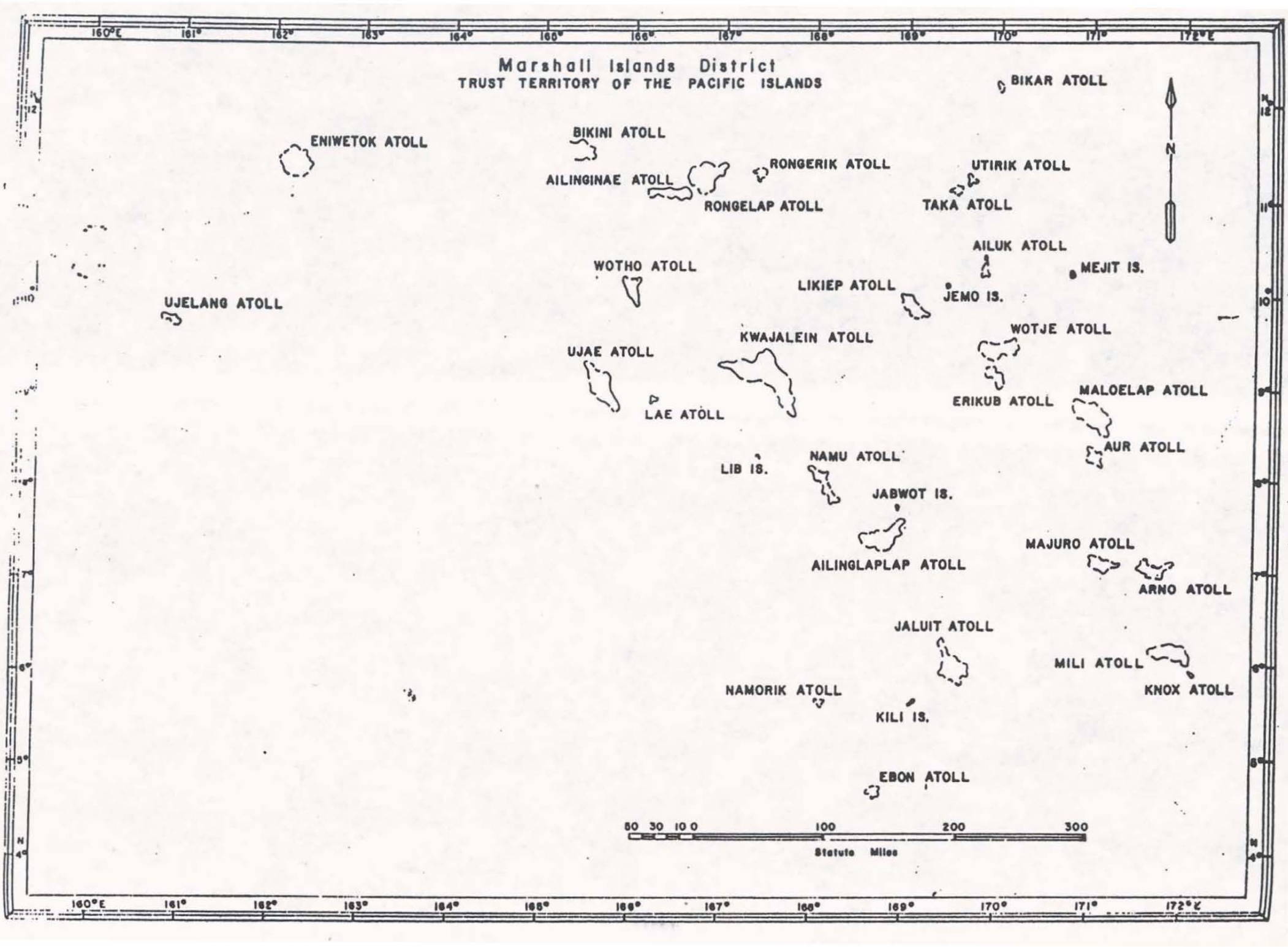
Marshall Islands District
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OVERVIEW

This qualitative study focuses on Marshallese women who graduated from institutions of higher education between the years of 1965 and 1985. Those two decades represent a time when educational opportunities were expanding and the women seized their newly available opportunities for higher education. The overall purpose of this study is to listen to the voices of the first Marshallese women to graduate from Western institutions of higher education. Their voices tell of educational journeys through their elementary school, high school, and college years, of family influences which propelled them along their way, and of the western influences which shaped their productive lives. Their voices reflect memories of their educational experiences both at home and abroad.

Although the oral transmission of information and tradition is as old as humankind, oral history as in the collection, preservation, and dissemination of historical data obtained through planned interviews is a relatively new discipline (Center for Oral History 1985:1).

There are different terms used in this type of study. Judith Bell in Doing your Research Project calls this kind of qualitative research "narrative inquiry" (Bell 1999:16) and sees it as a valuable source of data. This mode

of research involves the collection and development of stories which lead to a sharing of cultural backgrounds and an understanding of the lives of others. In the course of this research, personal accounts were obtained through open-ended interviews in which a multiple perspective of educational experiences from the women's points of view could be documented.

The oral history approach utilizes the spoken words of a living person and carries personal authenticity. Thus oral history is a valuable resource of the life experiences and ideas from people who are speaking of themselves (Thoonen 2000:62).

As a guest lecturer in a Pacific Islands graduate seminar in Spring 2000, Craig Howes, Director, Center for Biographical Research, University of Hawaii at Manoa, indicated that biography is more accurately termed life-writing and is a useful genre to raise more voices to tell more stories of lives in their own times and to illuminate corners of understanding. In that same seminar, Warren Nishimoto, Director, Center for Oral History, University of Hawaii at Manoa, commented that oral records are a primary source of information and can be used in the documentation of the past experiences and current thoughts so that the human side of life comes to light. Since the

overall purpose of this work is to tell the first-hand stories of educational tracks by the women, the oral history approach is a means to that end.

Much has been written about education in the atolls but nothing from the perspective of individuals who have personally journeyed through the system. Neither men nor women have been asked questions concerning their family backgrounds and what effects they may have had on their education. There is no information on how children felt about school, classmates, teachers, or activities. There are no answers as to where and why students went to college. Neither men nor women have been queried concerning their feelings about their education, their post-graduate years, their first jobs. This study attempts to add the dimension of women's voices, their reflections and projections about education to the existing literature which has been written by non-islanders.

The literature on education and on atoll peoples has been written almost exclusively by men. Researchers have been western-oriented males who wrote about island men and their lives. As island men rarely spoke for or about island women, women were as backdrops. The male researchers personal access to the worlds of women was limited and as a consequence, they had little or nothing to write about island women. Pacific women's

voices were all but silent in the documented records of the past, and for any period prior to 1920 it is virtually impossible to gain oral history from women (Ralston 1992:167).

This study concerns the lives of women who knew stories about their families. Both grandparents and parents lived in a matrilineal society which gave stability through the security of roots, land rights, and familial support. Did this background influence the choices of the women?

The grandparents matured under the rule of German authorities and the conversion by foreign missionaries. The grandparents learned a different language for the rulers and vernacular literacy for the church. They were exposed to western Christian morals and male domination which categorized islanders as uncivilized. Did this era influence the paths of the women?

The parents grew up under quite different foreign rule. Through force, they learned to use the rulers' language, attend rulers' schools, do the rulers' work. They were exposed to Japanese ethics, morals and male domination which categorized islanders as inferior. Did this era influence the paths of the women?

The women themselves grew up under American colonialism and learned that there were options and choices to make in education, dress, goods, new

behaviors and occupations. They were exposed to western materialism and gender equality. Islanders were categorized as Americans-in-progress and encouraged to exercise their choices and personal morals. Did this more permissive era influence the paths of the women?

The women graduated and returned to the islands for their productive years during the time of decolonization. They learned that women were necessary as equal participants in the democratic process of voting for constitutions, styles of government, and the people to operate within it. Did these years influence the subsequent paths of the women?

In writing about the educational period of 1965 to 1985 and the lives of these Marshallese women, I have relied upon their perception of their era. I also lived in the Marshall Islands during the same years and have known some of the women in this study. My personal acquaintance with them and my involvement in their lives provided me with many insights. I came to respect and to appreciate how the atoll-dwelling women face their days, make their decisions, and cope with their consequences.

In 1954, my California and western-educated self traveled into the Pacific with a husband and two young boys to work for two years in the area of Micronesia that was then called the U. S.Trust Territory of the PacificIslands

The two years stretched into thirty-seven years working in educational settings with the Micronesians of Truk (now Chuuk) in the Eastern Caroline Islands, Rota in the Marianas Islands, and the Marshall Islands.

The greatest number of years, 1961 to 1991, were spent in the Marshall Islands during the years of the Trust Territory administration. There, I worked as a teacher and volunteered in numerous educational and community development projects. First and foremost, it was as a volunteer that I worked for and with Marshallese women and gained insights and understanding into their lives.

My fifteen years as a volunteer included working with the Marshallese women to develop a viable handicraft operation that incorporated forty-eight women's groups. With a Marshallese partner, I helped to create a radio program to network with all the far-flung women's groups. We shared world and local news, ship and plane information, craft needs, household hints, and gossip. The program was an initial attempt to unite the atoll women and to welcome requests for assistance. One group wanted some classes in the western skills of cooking, language, manners, and volleyball. Another requested exchange arrangements with American women. Yet other groups wanted help to organize atoll women leaders into an association

of women leaders. Others wanted programs in leadership training for women.

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, decolonization and then self-government came to the Marshall Islands. The RMI became a self-governing nation in free association with the United States in 1986. As a volunteer, I had posed no threat to any person or to emerging nationalism in the Marshall Islands. I was first invited to be a member of the Board of Regents for the newly-constituted College of Micronesia, a system of three residential campuses and and six extension centers in the TTPI. Then I was invited to become part of the new RMI. My volunteer persona lessened but official responsibilities kept me in daily contact with the programs for island women. It was the total of those experiences that inform my interpretations of the interviews in this study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study involves the Marshallese women who graduated from an institution of higher learning between the years of 1965 and 1985. This first generation of graduates numbers about eighteen. Of these, one has died, three have retired, and the others continue to be actively employed.

Two of the women live in Honolulu, Hawaii; one has been assigned to another part of Micronesia; two reside on Ebeye in the Kwajalein Atoll and the others live on Majuro in the Majuro Atoll.

For reasons of time and transportation, the Marshallese who live on Ebeye and the woman who was working somewhere else in Micronesia were not contacted. The women who live on Majuro were contacted by e-mail and by telephone. Three women were interested but were planning to be off-island during a week in March 2001 when I was able to conduct research in Majuro. Four women were heavily involved with the Education Department which had a new head and was undergoing massive reorganization; they were not available. The Marshallese women who live in Hawaii were contacted and the interview times arranged during the fall of 2000.

Seven women confirmed and were available. They had earned degrees in

Anthropology, Economics, Education, English, Law, Science, and Sociology. The degrees were as varied as the women. Additionally, this study includes an interview with a woman with no opportunity to attend or graduate from any institution of higher learning. However, she laid the groundwork for women achievers and is included because of her impact on the women who did have such opportunities.

A sequence of steps were determined and followed. First, there was the personal telephone or e-mail contact. Then a personal meeting to explain the study to each one's satisfaction and understanding. Second, a face-to-face interview of one to two hours was completed. The draft of the interview was sent to each interviewee to read and revise. Third, a closing contact was done to re-affirm understanding of both the study and the ethics involved. The women preferred the use of their own names but not their birthdates.

The interviews explored the interviewee's family background to include remembrances about parents, siblings, play and work , as well as the special occasions during early childhood. The interviews additionally touched upon the educational background and reminiscences about early school experiences, changing schools, classmates, teachers, youth groups, acquaintance with different cultures and outstanding activities to remember.

Another part of the interview focused on college abroad, the sponsors of the college experience, the activities, problems, and successes most vividly recalled. The interview probed for information about graduations, family support, first jobs, and changes the women observed in themselves and their islands. Closing the interview emphasized comments upon the values of education and college achievement for women in the Marshall Islands.

Data collection was by tape recorder if the women felt comfortable with that idea or by manual note-taking if they preferred. The island women tend to not look directly at one when talking so a fit was possible between talking and not looking by the interviewee and listening and note-taking b;y the interviewer. Drafts of the interviews were used as revised by the women. Some revisions added text and others eliminated what had been said earlier. The final interview documents will be lodged on Majuro in the AleleMuseum which is accumulating documents for its archives.

First, I examine the common features which run through the stories of the women in the days when few women went abroad to school. Second, I look at the unexpected items which surfaced in the interviews

SETTINGS

Context of Place

Natural scientists have long studied the physical environments of the Pacific Islands. In Moshe Rapaport' s Pacific Islands: Environment and Society, (1999), many contributing authors reviewed studies on Pacific climate (A.P. Sturman and H.A. McGowan: 3-180), oceanography (L.D. Talley, G.J. Fryer, and R. Lumpkin: 19-32), geology (G.J. Fryer and P. Fryer: 33-42), geomorphology (P. Nunn: 43-55), water (D. Dupledge: 66-75). See Map I: The Pacific Islands

Other scientists have detailed the histories and cultures of Pacific peoples. In Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century (K.R.Howe R.C. Kiste, and B.V. Lal: 1994), investigators touched upon pre-colonial times (Kiste: 3-28), colonisation (Hanlon: 93-118), and social change (Schoeffel: 356-380).

Europeans conveniently divided the Pacific into three cultural areas which were labeled Melanesia (black islands), Micronesia (small islands), Polynesia (many islands). The appellations reflect to some extent the common origins, migrations, languages, the social and cultural practices of the people.

See Map II: Pacific Cultures.

As indicated, this study focuses on the coral atolls of the Marshall Islands which are situated in two parallel archipelagoes running north to south in the central Pacific. See Map III: The Marshall Islands.

Some of the Marshall Islands atolls are well-known to the outside world. Kwajalein Atoll is a United States missile base and was the site of a major battle during World War II. Bikini and Enewetak Atolls were used by the United States as nuclear testing sites. Majuro Atoll was the United States administrative center for the Marshall Islands in the former Trust Territory and is now the capitol of the RMI.

Other Marshallese atolls are known mostly to atoll dwellers. Some physical sense of atolls is necessary to understand the lives of the people who inhabit them. Most atolls are composed of islands scattered along a largely submerged coral reef that encloses a sheltered lagoon. An atoll is visually lovely like a jeweled necklace tossed onto a velvet background of deep blue which shades into turquoise as the sea nears a shore. An atoll can be small with only a few bits of land around its lagoon but a very large atoll has many islands around its lagoon which can harbor a great fleet of ships.

Ordinarily long and narrow, each island of an atoll is an ecosystem unto

itself. A coral island is a unique environment created by living organisms, beautiful to see but challenging to live upon (Alkire 1978:16). The soils are thin and vegetation is dependent upon the size of the island and the rain which falls upon it. Groundwater is dependent on the same two factors and fresh water is dependent on catchment resources. The small low-lying islands are susceptible to droughts and storms both of which may have devastating effects on the island and its people. The marine resources are usually rich and furnish a major source of protein (Alkire 1978:22). An atoll embraces its islands into a larger system which energizes exchanges and socio-political relationships. Somewhat of a paradox, a coral atoll has some negative factors which complicate human survival and positive factors which enrich human life.

The negative factors have to do with limits. Atoll islanders necessarily live in an environment of poor soils which limit land-based resources. Seasonal droughts and typhoons are disasters. Atolls are often far from any kind of human assistance; islanders are on their own in natural emergencies. These natural limits determine what is available to eat and to use and foster living in the present, one day at a time. Atoll living perpetuates time-honored activities which have proven survival worth. Each day is a daily challenge.

The positive factors highlight the resourcefulness of islanders who have learned to adapt and survive within their resource base. The sea gives up its marine life in abundance. Coral reefs are feeding grounds for a variety of small fish which attract larger fish. Atoll soils support vegetation which is tolerant of high salinity and periods of drought. It is possible to exist on coconuts and pandanus fruits. Wider islands have central areas which may support the conditions necessary for taro, arrowroot, and breadfruit. The limitless horizons allow one to dream and expand the soul. The constant hum and murmur of the ocean tides often foster a keen sense of hearing and low-pitched voices. A major source of entertainment is oral story-telling which promotes a love of details, mimicry, and memorization. Along with the transmission of the cultural forms and customs, oral creativity develops into the fine art which produces original chants, songs, pantomimes, games, and creative gossip.

Context of Time

After World War II, the United States established the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands under a 1947 United Nations mandate to administer the islands formerly held by the Japanese. The young administration furnished new employees with brief information on how to live as Americans in the islands of Micronesia. The Trust Territory personnel office published a twenty-page booklet for prospective employees; four paragraphs were on the Marshall Islands (TTPI Personnel Office:1965). The Information Handbook: Micronesia expanded the information to forty-three pages of which three pages were on the Marshall Islands. Some Americans reporting for duty in the Trust Territory were unaware of the existing and large body of literature about the islands and their inhabitants.

Early ships, explorers, and traders wrote ship's logs, letters, journals, and accounts of their adventures in the islands. Missionaries wrote to each other and to their sponsoring groups. They translated biblical materials and hymnals into the vernacular of wherever they operated. German colonialists corresponded with each other, their country, and their trading stations within the islands. Japanese colonialists carefully recorded their experiences, and

Japanese scholars studied and wrote for the posterity of Japan.

Much of the written work was in languages other than English and was not readily accessible to the Americans who became colonialists with the signing of the mandate. Forty-two American anthropologists, linguists, and geographers conducted individual and team projects as part of a foundation for development planning (Mason 1985:35).

Newcomers to the TTPI had information that the area was divided into six administrative districts. The Marshall Islands District was administered from Majuro Atoll. The atoll and its main island bore the same name. Armed with this scanty information, my first impressions were gained from visual observations of Majuro Atoll as I entered the Marshalls District in 1961.

From the air, the atoll was a glorious sparkling lagoon edged by white beaches and coconut palm tree, a visual treat. On the ground, Majuro Island itself was so narrow that a three-minute walk took one from the lagoonside to the oceanside. Between these two bodies of water, there was one unpaved and very dusty roadway stretching for perhaps twelve miles and connecting only three of the many atoll islands around the lagoon. During World War II, the Seabees had built an airfield which was still in good repair and in use by the seaplane which came once a week. The seaplane was the airlink with

Honolulu, Hawaii to the east, the islands of the other TTPI Districts, and Agana, Guam to the west. Leftover from the war were military vehicles now used by the U.S. administration, Japanese carts, bicycles, and motorized scooters which held families of five persons could be seen everywhere as well as many walking people.

Along this only road could be seen a large cement Catholic Church and a little further on there was a large wooden Protestant Church. Each church had a small elementary school and a small cemetery on the premises. Many island dwellings had gravesites in their front areas. A collection of quonset huts called itself a hospital and one small building was the government public elementary school. Also positioned along this road were three tiny counter-only stores which were sometimes open. One had a gas hose where someone could suck up the gas to start the flow into a container or a vehicle. An eight by ten doll house with an outside window functioned as the post office which opened after the arrival of the weekly seaplane. The post office was manned by the pastor of the Protestant Church. Early moonlighting. A second Protestant Church and its attendant school was across the lagoon and only accessible by canoes or small boats in good weather.

Amongst the many Marshallese were a few Gilbertese, Kusaieans, some

Ponapeans, Germans, and the handful of Americans representing American missions and the United States Department of Interior in the TTPI. There was quite a strong sense of kindness and respect noticeable in the Marshallese and always extended to non-Marshallese. An unfailing courtesy marked the behavior of adults, children to adults, and both to outsiders Gifts of food and materials were regular occurrences. In exchange, gifts of food were welcomed as well as precious and hard-to-get items such as soap and matches.

In those days, communications were by persons on foot. There were no telephones or other technology. Only ships and planes could talk via large, old, and cranky radios. We resorted to ham radio operators when one was available on the island. Marshallese took little notice of messages written on paper and any communication had to be delivered face-to-face. This meant talking to the appropriate person which further meant a great deal of walking around to find him/her. As messages cannot be just baldly said, a social time also ensued with the message buried within the conversation. It might take all day to receive or deliver two short messages.

Supplies for purchase were few and usually expired in rusty cans and bent packages. No freezer foods existed and root vegetables were a once-a-week

possibility. Local foods were given, not sold. Shopping at the tiny counter stores took several walks. No bags or boxes were available. Flattened shipping boxes were more valued as instant sleeping mats or sun shelters.

Island meals were a daily challenge. Marshallese men spent much time fishing and gathering while the Marshallese women spent considerable energy in food preparations. There was no way to save either the cooked or uncooked food. All food had to be eaten b;y mid-morning or given to the pigs. All day food preparation meant the main meal was ready to eat in the evening. Breakfast was the leftovers and lunch didn't happen.

Moonlit nights were for staying up, fishing, wandering around, visiting, and telling stories. Dark nights were scary, full of demons and to be avoided. There was little human activity on dark nights except for the men who may have gone fishing. If they were successful, lanterns would be lit, the fish cooked, and a meal enjoyed. One had to eat when food was available and before the sun brought spoilage. Food preservation was mainly by drying on the galvanized tin roofs or salting in hollow glass-ball fishing floats and then guarding against the rats, the crabs, and the insects.

Majuro Island was then what an outer island would be like in the next few decades. "Outer" implied away from the island with the government

center. The Marshallese paid little attention to government activities or the government people who were mostly American. Government included only a few islanders. Everyone concentrated on their own all-encompassing concerns. They lived a subsistence lifestyle which means everything was done of necessity. Necessity required the daily gathering, preparing, and preservation of food according to the season, month, and time of day. Necessity required the preparation of natural materials for shelters, clothes, canoes, tools, and crafts. Special efforts were made to have fresh water and to regulate its use. Water was a precious commodity; small low islands do not allow for fresh water deep wells or a fresh water lens under every island. Other special efforts addressed sanitation, hygiene, laundry, pest controls. The major cleansing forces were the twice-a-day tides, fairly consistent winds and the regular rains, beach sand and the judicious use of resources. Garbage was not a problem as the advent of disposable everything was in the future.

A sense of place in one's own family and one's extended family, of place in relation to one's gender and age were necessary and learned at very young ages. The place of one's family in the island's ranking system and the place of oneself in relation to inheritance and land rights were relationships which every child breathed in daily. A youngster needed to respond appropriately

with speech and behavior to each person on the island. Everyone knew you and all about you; there were no secrets on an island.

Boys and girls learned to live in and to perpetuate their island world. They understood their island rules and roles, but also increasingly saw the new roles of various church and government workers. They noticed that girls could learn teaching, nursing, office work; boys could learn new roles also. However, children usually did as they were told or allowed to do. Deciding on one's own was just not thought about. Few parents looked to the future in the hope of a different life for their children.

Girls were valuable at home for baby care, yard raking, clothes washing, dish cleaning, ironing with the heavy Japanese charcoal irons, making the charcoal from coconut shell, cooking, sewing, weaving, gathering food, coconuts to dry, copra to bag, small stones to pave the yards and paths. These kinds of subsistence activities took all the girls' time but work was lightheartedly done. There was little compartmentalization of what was work and what was play. Work was for socializing and so was play. The daily activity of personal grooming by picking lice out of the hair took up a lot of time and was part of the social activity and news reports of the day.

Education was a different matter. School was not compulsory. Some

children went to no school as schools were not available on every atoll. Some boys went to school until the eighth grade; few girls went to school. School was not a necessity for island living. Education was not seen as compulsory nor deemed essential for girls.

The women of this study achieved their advanced educational standing in an era when few women were thinking of education as either a good thing, a goal, or a stepping stone to something else. These young women were socialized into island lives where education was regarded as important but not a high priority for girls. How could they persist and achieve in the competitive western academic arenas far away from their familiar lands and supportive family relationships?

Context of Education

The Marshall Islands had a long tradition of teaching cultural skills by oral transmission (Downing 1992:1) as well as apprenticeships (Coletta 1980:21). Oral expression was the main method for passing on the rich history, folklore, and religious concepts (Mather 1999:296). Culture related things of importance were transmitted orally in the time-honored way within the family by grandparents to their grandchildren. Fathers taught sons and mothers taught daughters (Leinwand 1981:61).

In the 1850s, missionaries from overseas looked at education in the islands of Micronesia through different eyes and for different purposes. They used the mission stations to convert and the mission schools to civilize. Early formal education was almost wholly in the hands of missionaries with the bulk of teaching done by missionary women (Denoon, Firth, Linnekin, Meleisea, and Nero (eds) 1997:201). Small mission schools began efforts to create a literate people who could read religious works in the vernacular, to train boys to become pastors and christianize their own people, and train girls to care for themselves and their families in western ways. Small mission schools serving the children of one island were eventually enlarged to become

schools serving the children of more than one island while pastor training schools drew young boys from other atolls. Expansion to more students resulted in the development of boarding schools. Some students made the transition from family and community-based learning to the more formal venues of classrooms (Mather 1999:296).

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions from Boston opened the first mission station in the Marshalls at Ebon in 1857, the first mission school in 1860, and the first training school in 1869 (Hezel 1983:207) Ten years later the training school moved to Kusaie in the Caroline Islands where a mission had been established in 1852. Many Marshallese students attended school on the high island of Kusaie where "everywhere was beauty" and greenness and the soil productive for plants (Bliss 1906:19). The school was a week day school where Kusaiens, Gilbertese, and Marshallese students were taught in a school run like a family but away from home influences and chiefly interferences (Bliss 1906:98). Girls were taught as the future wives for the male graduates (Bliss 1906:100).

There was a definite difference between the work of men and the work of women (Cormack 1956:93). For men, church services, pastor training, and mission maintenance was emphasized while women served as wives, leaders

of other women, and cleaners. By 1932, the men formed the Association of Marshall Island Churches and the churches were managed totally by the church committees. It was a family source of pride to have family members as part of church work (Wilson 1954:18).

The German Catholic missionaries of the Sacred Heart came to stay, first at Jaluit Atoll in 1899, then at Likiep Atoll in 1902, and then at Arno Atoll. Priest and sisters offered six to eight years of German language and religion for the children of the highest ranking chiefs (Hezel 1995:124).

American Catholic missionaries took over and established the Holy Rosary Elementary School on Likiep in 1948 and Assumption Elementary on Majuro Atoll in 1954 (Hezel 1995:272).

By 1960, the Marshallese had had over 100 years of missionization. The Protestant and Catholic churches had become major and central parts of the island life; pastors had a status only slightly lower than chiefs. Girls began training as novitiates and teachers (Antilla 1965:277). Two Marshallese girls embarked on the novitiate course to its finish but today only one woman is a practicing sister from the Marshalls (Hezel 1991:279).

The Germans who were an occupying power from 1899 to 1914 had their own purposes which were mainly commercial (Oliver 1989:235). They were

interested in the planting, harvesting, and selling of copra, hemp, and coffee. Germans had been doing business at Jaluit Atoll since 1878 and in 1885 they gained protectorate status over the Marshall Islands (Hempenstall 1978:34). Education was not a German priority. The Protestant mission schools just continued teaching for their own reasons, created written forms of the native language, and translated religious texts for island use (Peacock 1990:5). The Germans often assisted the missions with financing to support the teaching of the German language (Hanlon 1994:102).

German times were too brief to have had a large impact on education but it was long enough to change some attitudes and add new ways of solving problems. It was long enough to establish non-religious customs and some technologies (Ballendorf 1982:4).

After World War I, the years of 1914 to 1944 were the Japanese era; they had entirely different purposes in the Marshall Islands. They wanted to Japanize and assimilate the islanders, make the islands available for more Japanese and use the islands for their own economic development. To begin the process with the very young, missions schools were shut down; the Japanese instituted elementary schools for their own Japanese children and separate schools for the eight-to-twelve year old Marshallese. I t was an

initial and rudimentary school system (Hanlon 19 : ch. 5). By 1923, school was compulsory and Marshallese children attended for three years with a supplemental course for selected students (Yanaihara 1939:241).

The children learned the Japanese language, Emperor worship like good Japanese, and a slate of Japanese ethics: respect for honesty, industriousness, obedience, and obligations (Antilla 1965:199, Ballendorf 1982: 4). The Japanese purposed to create a labor force for the Japanese with young locals as manual laborers and young women as domestics for immigrant Japanese. The island native schools became the public schools of the time, strictly run by Japanese teachers who regularly used physical punishment. The Japanese use of compulsory schooling to further state ethical and moral codes (Oliver 1989:238) was the foundation for parents of the women of this study. Those parents learned well, became Japanese language speakers, highly ethical, and well-disciplined.

Following World War II, the Americans were in charge with specific purposes for their presence and different reasons for their involvement in education. Their presence was a political strategy to keep other powers out of the Pacific area and to have the islands available for American interests. Their involvement in education was in fulfillment of a promise to provide free

public education to all children, to create English-speaking inhabitants, and to educated islanders toward a future goal of self-determination.

From 1948 to 1951, the U.S. Department of the Navy furnished annual reports to the United Nations on the administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The last report of the naval administration indicated that the elementary schools were a municipal responsibility and were staffed by Micronesian teachers who were graduates of mission schools and knew some English. A system of six years for elementary schools, three years for intermediate schools was similar to the known American system and set in place by the navy. There was a clear need to train islanders to teach their own people and the navy created the Pacific Islands Teacher Training School (PITTS) to fill that need. The secondary education of navy times included PITTS, a School of Communications, and a School of General Education. The navy also sent Marshallese to Fiji for medical and dental training while there was nursing training in Guam (Peacock 1990:13-15).

After 1951, the U.S. Department of the Interior was replaced by the navy and reported on all aspects of the Trust Territory until each of the Trust Territory island entities achieved self-determination.

By the early 1960s, Marshallese students had access to a few public and

mission elementary schools and one intermediate school within the Marshall Islands. Secondary and tertiary schooling was elsewhere by arrangement. Within the Trust Territory, the available post-secondary institutions were the School of Nursing in Saipan, Marianas Islands and the School for Dental Hygienists in Majuro, Marshall Islands (Annual Report to the United Nations 1960:139). Two Marshallese girls attended the Dental Hygienist School and one girl attended a school in Hawaii (Annual Report to the United Nations 1960:237). Women of these years could train to become nurses, dental hygienists, teachers, and clerks.

The 1961 Annual Report showed one Marshallese girl in Guam. Within the Marshalls, two girls graduated from the School of Dental Hygienists two-year program (Micronesian Reporter, v. X, No. 6, 1962:10). Within the Trust Territory, a third post -secondary educational institution opened on Ponape. The Micronesian Teacher Education Center accepted students for teacher training in a two-year program. In 1963, one Marshallese girl went to Fiji for specialized training in Home Economics (Micronesian Reporter, v. XI, No. 3, 1963:12), and one girl went to Hawaii on a scholarship (Micronesian Reporter, v. XI, No. 2, 1963:17).

The movement toward higher education for Micronesians began in navy

times and represented a change in opportunities (Peacock 1990:17). Though movement was slow, there were choices and by 1965 a Marshallese young woman could attend the two-year post-secondary institutions within the Trust Territory or go abroad in pursuit of higher education. Financial arrangements were with the aid of government scholarship, church sponsorships, or through private aid. In 1967, there were Marshallese girls attending institutions in the Trust Territory as well as in Hawaii, Guam, United States, and Philippines Degree education became available and the decade of the 1970s saw girls from the Marshalls abroad for higher education in double-digit numbers. Not everyone stayed the course and graduated. The Annual Report of 1972 and 1973 showed a total of six woman graduates from the Marshalls. However, the reports include those supported all or in part by American arrangements and finances.

Higher education statistics went unreported during the last three years of the decade. The TTPI was breaking down into separate entities and the Marshall Islands was becoming the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI or RepMar). The Trust Territory Bureau of Education was not responsible for sending students abroad, nor for providing complete financial support. The Bureau only assisted by putting together a financial package to cover student

expenses. A package might include a TTPI assistance grant, a district legislature grant, a scholarship from the intended college abroad, and federal aid from BEOG/ CWS options (32nd Annual Report to the United Nations 1979:109).

By 1980, the RMI took over the responsibility for student services and the management of local scholarships. The 1981 Annual Report indicated that the RMI Nitijela [legislature] provided $230,000 for assistance grants and loans to Marshallese students attending colleges and universities outside the RMI. The RMI government kept its records through a Marshall Islands Scholarship Grant and Loan Board (Annual Report to the United Nations 1981:180).

Not included in the available statistics through the annual reports to the United Nations was pertinent information about the educational atmosphere which permeated the Marshall Islands school years for these women. The philosophy of education underwent a series of changes during the American administration of the public schools in the Marshall Islands and the women grew up during those changes.

The naval administration initially established some elementary schools, an intermediate school, and specialized training venues in an educational

program which aimed to benefit the many with broad goals and policies on language, curriculum content, and level of instruction.

The Department of the Interior's first director of education was unusual; he was a progressive educator and felt schools should reflect the life of their society (Peacock 1990:24). He restructured education with his emphasis on island-related curriculum with some core classes. He chose to do this through teacher training and production of vernacular texts both of which were to be island-centered so that students could learn to work with what they have in order to solve the needs of their communities. District education departments were encouraged to create and use texts in the Marshallese language until the fourth grade at which time vernacular literacy might be reached and teaching of and in the English language might begin. Bilingualism was espoused long before bilingual activities were conceived, legislated, and financed in federal programs.

The advent of the 1960s ushered in new adminstrators in Washington, new heads in the Trust Territory, increased budgets, accelerated movement for education abroad and philosophical shifts within the Territory. The focus was English only to the neglect of local perspectives. Vernacular texts were out, American texts in English were in and used in the public schools. The

children were exposed to texts and lessons by Marshallese teachers who themselves were unprepared to teach everything in a foreign language. The students were inadequately prepared for the next academic steps whether within the territory or elsewhere. The merits of bilingual thinking, becoming literate first in one's own language, using vernacular texts to do so, then maintaining one's first language while learning a foreign language in addition were all in the future.

The women of this study were born onto a scene in which traditional information was passed on in traditional ways: their grandparents and young parents had grown up in a Christian world as participants, leaders, and as teachers with strong beliefs in Western Christian principles; Their adult parents had lived through the Japanese years, absorbed Japanese discipline and observed ethical behavior in their lives. The girls inherited their parental genes and transmitted traditional customs. They witnessed the parental practicing of Western ethics from the missionaries and of Eastern ethics from the Japanese years. What would they do with this mix of influences in their lives?

She is proud to be one of the early role models for Marshallese women today most of whom are getting involved in jobs outside the home, a practice unheard of more than thirty years ago (Green 1987:163).

An interview with Mary Lanwi on March 4, 2001

Older than the other interviewees, Mary trailblazed the development of women inside and outside of the traditional boundaries of Marshallese life. She is included here as the forerunner of the twentieth century women in the Marshall Islands. She has seen her life changed by the activities of the Japanese years, World War II, the United Nations, the United States, the Marshallese thrust toward self-determination, and the RMI.

She was born on Jaluit Atoll into her Marshallese world that balanced her family, the island traditions, and the long-established mission churches. The middle child of three girls, she remembered her sisters.

> My older sister was like a leader. I was the middle girl and like a police person, and my younger sister always seemed in good shape. Two brothers came along later.

Her early school years were church-oriented as the only schools then available were run by missionaries of the Protestant Church or sisters of the Catholic Church.

> Our parents didn't want us to go to any school, especially a Catholic school, so we learned at home with our mother or in the Protestant missionary school. My parents were very involved with the Jaluit Protestant Church.

She remembered her father as being always busy and a good provider for his family.

> He kept pigs, chickens and turkeys and we children were expected

> to help. We went to Kosrae because my father was to help the missionary lady we called Mother Hoppin with the translation of the Bible at Mwot Christian School. I attended there from 1937 to 1940. My father ordered books and encouraged us to read and to learn.

She remembered her mother as working hard and expecting her daughters to help her around the home.

> The family put a lot of work on me. One day, my mother told me to prepare taro for lunch for my father. My older sister was supposed to do it but she said she was too busy and I said, "I'm busy, too!" I was mad and crying because I seemed to get all the work. My mother asked me to do the laundry and I told her I wanted to change my name. She asked, "to what?" When I said, "Cinderella", my mother cried because she knew what I meant. It was tough to be the middle daughter.

Marriage was not a personal choice for Mary. She reflected that,

> My grandfather wanted me to marry Isaac Lanwi; my father didn't want me to as Isaac was a little related to us and I didn't want to marry either. My grandfather was strong and the marriage was arranged. We were graduated from Mwot and married on Kosrae. We became teachers at Mwot, speaking both Marshallese and Kosraean.

Kosrae was a place of firsts: their graduations, first jobs as teachers, and responsibilities for their growing children. However, the World War II in the Pacific was coming closer.

> My parents returned to the Marshalls but we stayed teaching at Mwot. My father and mother sent many things to our young family and also wrote to tell us a last ship was coming and to

get on it or we would have to stay put.

The Japanese had a list of the people who would be allowed to return to the Marshall Islands and they enforced it strictly and unfortunately.

> Our names were not on the Japanese list of people who could return and so we could not return. There were about twenty students whose names were not on the list and they could not return either. We felt sorry for the young students and stayed caring and teaching them until the end of the war. My husband spoke Japanese and that helped ease our way. The Japanese had come and said not to touch any food or thing without first asking them – no animals, pigs, dogs, chickens, etc. It was rough at the beginning but later the Japanese became very good to us because they said we were honest and made no trouble for them. Our first son was named for a high Japanese official. Japanese planes dropped about fifty bombs but none fell on us, and only one fell in the pass at Kosrae. We were in peace all the time until the end of the war. We had many good memories of the Japanese and Kosrae.

After the war, the family returned to the Marshall Islands in stages on the available but unscheduled vessels.

> We took an American ship to Kwajalein Atoll and stayed on one of the small islands in the lagoon before going on to Majuro Atoll and on to Ebon Atoll. We had three young boys by then and also two Kosraean children which we cared for-- like adoption. We went to look for my father and my mother. We heard many stories but we didn't find them. Maybe the Japanese killed them; maybe they ran away and somehow disappeared. We never found out.

Living mainly on Majuro, she and her husband began their productive lives in the Marshall Islands.

> While we were at Majuro, my husband was asked to work at the hospital and he began his long career as a doctor in the Marshalls. The first teacher training classes were then going on at the Marshall Islands Teacher Training School (MITTS) and my younger brother had come from Ebon to attend with other young men and women. He asked me to attend the first graduation of public grade school teachers. However, I was at Laura which was across the lagoon from where the graduation was to be. I went on a canoe with my three young boys and I will never do it again!! I was scared. That was my first and last canoe trip. Even though the weather was good and the wind just right, I worried that I couldn't take care of my three boys and there weren't enough other adults to do so.

Mary continued her work with the church as a teacher in the mission at Laura. She took care of students who married, had babies, and didn't know what to do with them. She gave food, diapers, clothes, baths, and lots of her time. She raised her own nine children during those teaching years for the mission. Her father and Isaac's father worked together for the church and the school, teaching and operating the Protestant mission. School (Micronesian Reporter v. VI, No. 6, 1958:20).

> Mission teachers always taught without any pay so my teaching at Mwot on Kosrae from 1941 to 1943, at Laura mission and at Rongrong Christian High School from 1945 to1948 were all unsalaried positions. I didn't receive a salary until my children were born and I was able to be away for hours at a time. My first salaried job was for the Marshall Islands Teacher Training School (MITTS) in 1957 and 1958. That was the end of class-room teaching years for me.

Mary Lanwi was instrumental in operating the practice schools for teacher training (Micronesian Reporter v. VII, No. 3, 1959:26). These were years of translating English language booklets into Marshallese as part of a government push for materials in the vernacular. Mary's language skills were of a high order and she translated A Recipe Book for Pacific Islanders, Bok in Kamminene ilo First Aid, Kwe im Post Office, and Kilen Komat Mona nan Aelin in Marshall. All of these were for use in the schools of the Marshalls.

It was during the late 1950s that she started thinking about women and an association for women (Micronesian Reporter v.VI, No. 6, 1958:22). The Trust Territory had by then instituted the Community Development Department and there was an office in each of the six districts of the Trust Territory. The Marshall Islands District established a Women's Interests Office (WIO) within that department and Mary became the first official woman. It was a one-woman office with responsibility for all the women in the Marshall Islands.

> Very few girls went to high school and/or graduated in those days. Girls were not yet being sent away for higher education. Women's meetings and conferences were also few so it was necessary to develop myself as I developed my office and the women of the Marshall Islands. On-the-job training was the only way in those days. Fortunately, slow development is

> good development in our islands and I was able to learn and to teach myself to teach others.

Mary was one of three Micronesian women who attended a conference of Pan Pacific and South East Asian Women's Association in 1958. Her role as leader of women's groups began. Looking backwards, she can see the many directions which she initiated for women who were just beginning to think beyond their traditional family ways. She knew that changes were on the way and that women needed to develop themselves and expand their roles.

> I'm most happy to remember the many ways my office was able to help other women. We slowly developed more than fifty clubs of women throughout the Marshall Islands, organized initially to combine the handicraft making and selling activities. We initiated a cooperative for women to market the handicraft together with a radio program to keep all the women in contact with each other. The Girl Scout people of New York came to encourage Girl Scouts in the Marshalls and soon several troops of Girl Scouts existed to work with the young girls of the islands. Women began asking for specific kinds of assistance and programs which focused on child care, nutrition, health, parenting, and cooking. An umbrella organization held together the various far-flung groups and their leaders had annual meetings. The handicraft organization made visible the fact that Marshallese handicraft is some of the best in the Pacific and that Marshallese women have manual as well as organizational skills which are marketable.

By 1963, each women's club had officers whose groups were getting

involved in more than handicraft. They promoted good community life in the islands and encouraged the production of handicraft as a means to do so (Hourglass, February 1966). The handicraft cooperative exported to shops in Kwajalein, Guam, and Hawaii as well as individuals. The Kwajalein shop sold the craft and the profits funded scholarships to further higher education of Micronesians (Hourglass , October 1964:3).

Mary's work, her personality, and her interests combined to create the guiding force which laid the foundations for women's activities into many heretofore untried areas for women. Her radio program was called Ainikien an Kora which means the Voice of Women. In those days before women thought beyond their islands, she was that voice. She was the pioneer of women's organizational work in the Marshall Islands and an example to other women in the Trust Territory. Retired now, she continues as a valued repository of Marshallese traditions and pointer into new directions.

In recognition of her political firsts and her contribution to the improvement of Marshallese lives in general and women in particular, she was selected to represent Marshallese women in the International Women's Year in 1978

(Green 1987:156)

An Interview with Carmen Milne on March 4, 2001

Carmen Milne is a singularly attractive lady who is interested in her family genealogy. Born on Kosrae, she has heard about her Scots great grandfather and her Gilbertese great grandmother. She has heard that one of their three children married a Marshallese woman who was the mother of Carmen's father, Alexander. Her father was a missionary on Ebon Atoll when he was assigned to the island of Kosrae in the Caroline Islands and to the village of Mwot where he was to be a teacher for the American Board of Foreign Missions Christian School.

The family had two girls, then Carmen, and two more girls before her father was reassigned to head the Protestant Church of Majuro Atoll. The family, with Carmen and the two younger sisters traveled to Majuro Atoll where her personal memories began. She lived in Majuro Atoll, in Laura village at the Protestant mission house where she remembers playing with a younger brother and her first job.

> One of my jobs as a youngster was to blow the conch shell from one end of Laura village to the other summoning people to come and worship. I hated that job because it made my jaw muscles hurt.

It was during these early years of her life at Laura that World War II reached the Marshalls and became threatening to her family.

World War II operations were accelerating in the Pacific area and

> the Japanese Military Government had taken over. The war had brought bad luck to my family and especially to my father. Because he was the head of the Majuro Protestant Church he had to conduct regular services for the church which the Japanese government was opposed to and he would not beat up American soldiers of war when ordered to do so by the Japanese. He was labeled as an American spy because he spoke English. Eventually, he was taken to Tarawa Island in Maloelap Atoll where he was subsequently killed by the Japanese.

Because her family was so clearly church-centered, her first school experiences were through Sunday school where children learned how to behave in a class group, singing, reading, the Bible, writing and oral recitations.

The Japanese closed down the mission schools and established Japanese schools in some of the islands. Not every island had a school and many children did not attend school.

> After the war, the Navy established a teacher training school for the Marshallese on Kwajalein and that school was later moved to Majuro. When enough Marshallese were trained to be grade school teachers, the U.S. Government established a school on every atoll. These schools became the first government schools in the Marshalls. I attended the government school at Laura in the Majuro Atoll. But later, the Protestant Mission opened a mission school in Laura so I quit the government school and went to the mission school. I liked going to school. The mission school at Laura was organized and taught by the missionary, Eleanor Wilson, also known as Mother Wilson. Mary Lanwi and other Marshallese were recruited to teach at the school as well.

Life at home was busy as Carmen's mother tried to raise and provide

for her children. She insisted that the children take part in doing daily and weekly necessary things.

> She organized chores for us, such things as picking up the yard before breakfast, washing clothes, starching, ironing the clothes, caring for the chickens and pigs and cooking after school. She made up go to school part of every day. On the week-end we had to clean our house ;by scrubbing the floor every Saturday and airing out the contents of the house. We had to haul water from the well up to our house which was about four steps above ground.

In addition to taking care of the children and organizing their lives in some productive and cooperative ways, the mother made their lives special in her own way.

> My mother had a sewing machine which was always busy. She would make new dresses for us for special occasions like Christmas, Easter Sundays. My mother got sick and died when I was ten years old. After that I did not want to go to school. The schools of those days were not compulsory so I did not go at all.

However, education was in her future and one of her uncles said she should go back to school. He was a teacher at the government school in Rita at the other end of the Majuro Atoll. Carmen wanted to go to school in the Protestant Christian School at Rongrong in Majuro Atoll and just a short crossing from Laura. It was considered a higher school than the one in Laura but the tuition was $20.00 a year. One of her uncles paid that.

> I had great family support. In between school years, my uncles

> cousins, and I would go to our island within the lagoon to make enough copra to cover my school tuition. By that time, one of my older sisters got married and she and her husband gave me pocket money for other items I needed.

The missionary lady, Eleanor Wilson, went from Laura to organize and manage the school on Rongrong. She was joined by Mr. Robert Loomis and his wife, Ruby, as well as other Marshallese teachers. Later on, Miss Anna Dederer joined the staff.

> Life at Rongrong was hard but good. It was a boarding school with dormitories for the older girls and one for the younger ones. The school was poor. It was a private school supported by a group of Protestant churches which was known as Jaran Rakik Dron (JRD) and the group did not have any money. The school got its operating funds from the tuitions and donations. We were hungry a lot. Breakfasts were mostly rice soups with bits of fish as available, day after day. Lunch was a nap instead of food. This time was followed by work details, a time to collect much materials for the buildings. Most of the buildings were made out of thatch, except for the library and the church. The girls were locked in at night. Subject matters taught were Bible, English, mathematics, social studies, singing, and Marshallese spelling. Marshallese skills like weaving thatch roof materials for girls and some building and fishing for boys were taught the afternoons during the work detail sessions. Graduation was after the completion of sixth grade. Christmas time the school closed and we went to Laura to join in the festivities with people from around the atoll. That was one time all of us were looking forward to not only join in all the festivities but also to get out of Rongrong and to see our friends and relatives.

Mission school stopped with the sixth grade. The next option was an Intermediate School or go away from the Marshall Islands for more school.

Carmen continued her education in the Marshall Islands Intermediate School (MIIS) which was a government -operated school with grades seventh to ninth. She liked those years and those subjects except for mathematics. Carmen graduated with the biggest group of girls to date and was ready for high school. The only high school available before 1962 was not in the Marshall Islands but in the Truk Islands where the Pacific Islands Central School (PICS) served the youth of all the six Trust Territory districts.

> My first year the school was on Truk. The second year the school relocated to its new campus on Ponape. I and another girl were the only two Marshallese female students in that school. I enjoyed meeting the students from other districts. My first day was scary as I was taken and left alone at the girls' dormitory. I wasn't sure of my language. While I knew a lot of English words I had never put them together in conversation. A Ponape girl was the first one I talked to in English and she understood me. I was so happy and I felt comfortable speaking in the English language after that. I've never had problems with other people if I can talk with them. The absence of many Marshallese was no problem for me and I graduatead from PICS in 1961, the second Marshallese girl to graduate from high school.

Education was put on hold for Carmen when she returned to Majuro and delivered her first child. She went to teach at her old school, MIIS, and worked in the school library which was just beginning. While she was at this school,she had the opportunity to attend college. She became the first Marshallese woman to utilize a scholarship abroad.

> The ZONTA CLUB of Honolulu wanted to sponsor a Marshallese woman to attend the University of Hawaii. The club's membership was composed of the top professional women in Hawaii. The ZONTA CLUB encouraged young Micronesian women to continue in higher education. My two older sisters encouraged me to apply and then to go. I stayed with the President of the club who also happened to be the President of the Education Department at the University of Hawaii for one semester. The second semester I moved in with a girl from Ponape. She was also attending the University. Also, incidentally, this was the same girl I first met in high school on Truk. The Micronesian students had an advisor who saw to it that we got together occasionally. It was a difficult experience academically and I often missed home. It had been difficult to leave my daughter behind but my uncle and his wife took her and raised her with the help from my cousin and my sisters. The support I received from the ZONTA CLUB was not enough to cover my other expenses, so the University of Hawaii Women's Club agreed to help. That helped to ease my financial difficulties. One of my cousins came to the University and we became roommates. She was studying nursing and became the first Marshallese registered nurse (R .N.). During my last year at the University, the Marshall Islands Nitijela [parliament] gave me a scholarship to complete my studies.

Carmen became more interested in people and their cultures. Psychology and economics were difficult and an especially difficult professor made her life miserable. He told her to give up and go home as she would never make the grade.

> That mean person made me decide to stay. If others can do this, so could I.

Students often have special trouble living in dormitories with strangers, but she seemed to thrive on that kind of experience.

> The dorm was nice, comfortable and affordable for us students. It was an old home converted into a student residence with a lot of bedrooms, each with its own bathroom but we shared the kitchen, dining hall and appliances like the refrigerator and the deep freezer. We didn't have enough money and usually there wasn't any food in the house. We were usually hungry at night after our study and especially during exam week. We would then collect all the pennies we could find and go to a Chinese restaurant and would buy a big bowl of soup. There were students from other c countries like Korea, Iran, Belau, Japan, Tibet, as well as local mainland and of course us from the Marshall Islands all living there. We all got to know and like each other to the point that we would take each other's food without asking. One of the older men devised a court system where we would conduct a hearing whenever someone complained about missing his/her stuff from the kitchen. A jury was always selected. The accused had to find a lawyer. If he/she was found guilty, the punishment was to treat the rest of us to a big bowl of Chinese soup.

Carmen finally decided on anthropology as her focus and graduated in 1966 with a B.A. in that field and the first Marshallese woman to do so. Then she was ready for the working world in the Marshall Islands.

> My first post-grad job was teaching at the Marshall Islands High School which had begun as MIIS, was now MIHS and included ninth to twelfth grades. I was again a teacher. When the federal programs arrived in the 1960s, I worked with the Marshalls Community Action Agency (MCAA), and then with another federal program, Adult Basic Education (ABE) doing outreach teaching to groups of working people. It seems I am always teaching in the schools, in the government programs, in the community activities. Even as an elected official of the Congress of Micronesia and as the appointed head of a new ministry in the emerging government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. I always find myself organizing, coordinating. And implementing programs which are teaching programs for every segment of our population.

After many years of living in the public eye as the first and only congresswoman in the Congress of Micronesia, as Director of Public Affairs and as the Secretary of Internal Affairs, Carmen has surmounted problems of the government, had the personal ups and downs associated with such a public life, and she has been the foundation of on-going Marshallese activities.

> I'm often satisfied to realize how many people I have reached over the years and that they not only have learned what I have taught but also have become big leaders in our society. I am also very proud of my part in the preservation of the Marshallese culture through my work in the establishment of the Alele Corporation which consists of the public library, the national archives, and the national museum.

Carmen has been a natural light to whom men and women turn for leadership. She has been able to blend her island background and her western education with few conflicts and by actions appropriate to people and situations. She is both serious and humble, a go-getter and a laid-back personality. Unafraid of work she has been unexpectedly retired from the government and is somewhat bemused to be on the outside looking in. She continues to be active in women's issues and women's groups as well as in Alele's efforts to validate Marshallese identity.

Her role as a member of the Nitijela has encouraged and convinced other women that they can participate in the political process: that being a Senator is an accessible goal (Green 1987:160).

An Interview with Evelyn Konou in October 2000

A cheerful looking Marshallese woman wearing a dark skirt and a yellow pullover sweater, Evelyn Konou had reminiscences for the interview. She was born in Laura in Majuro Atoll but moved to Jaluit Island in Jaluit Atoll when she was only a few years old. Her earliest years were full of happy times. Doing chores came first but even chores were fun and developed skills.

> As a child, I always loved chicks. I used to have one or two as my pets. I remember I used to know whereabouts each hen laid eggs in their nests. I was very good at finding the nests. My father raised over 100 chickens on our property. Whenever we decided to have eggs, I was the one to go out and bring the nests. I was very proud for my skill.

Collecting food s and things were jobs for children. Copra is the dried meat of ripe coconuts and when sold was the only cash crop. Collecting coconuts to turn into copra became a game of its own.

> I used to collect tons of waini (the coconut which falls when ripe) for my father. It was like a game to me because I could run on the green grass under the plantation of coconut trees like crazy. I really enjoyed it. I loved to see a big and tall pile of waini. I saw it like an accomplishment and it made me happy.

Building and then rebuilding thatched roof houses was an important part of island life and was one of the major projects in a community. Neighbors turned out to help a family knowing they would help in turn.

> Reciprocity is one of the valuable principles in our custom. When we had new roof to build or old roofs to replace, my parents always prepared lots of food such as pork which meant a couple of our biggest pigs had to be killed, fish, breadfruits and biro (preserved breadfruit) as well. Because the entire community would come and help in the building or replacing our houses my parents had to be well-prepared. The men would work on the roofs and the women would prepare the thatches. Children would play and of course enjoy the food. The project usually took more than one day. I remember I always wished that working on our roofs took more long so I could have more times with my friends.

Christmas holidays were the happiest of occasions and the best times of the year. Celebrating was for all ages, a family affair which took many weeks of practice before Christmas.

> I remember every night before Christmas, our family joined the others in practicing songs for Christmas. Each family prepared food or refreshment to bring to the church where the practices took place. The best thing I remember was the children were allowed to practice also. We sang, played, and of course ate a lot. When there was a full moon we enjoyed playing on the beach. There were lots of food and fun.

The islands of the Marshalls are mostly parts of atolls and atoll life is hard. Living is subsistence based and full of responsibilities for women.

> Marshallese women have huge family responsibilities as they are the sole cores of their clans, lineage and above all their families. They are mothers, not only to the immediate family but also to their extended families. They looked and took care of children. They prepared every meal, washed laundry, cleaned around the

> house and more daily routines. Some women made copra with the men. I did not see any woman involved in any public meeting.

Evelyn remembered her mother as a very accomplished lady, friendly and thoughtful, and one who always liked to help people. She was very easy to get along with

> My mother was educated at the Missionary Protestant School run by Rev. Carl Heine during the Japanese Administration in the Marshalls. My mother loved reading. She was considered as highly literate in her generation. She loved music and I remember she used to play her organ every morning. Unfortunately, I missed my opportunity to learn music from her. She was a musician and also very active in our church. My mother was also a very good cook in both Marshallese and Japanese dishes.

Evelyn remembered her father as very tough and very hard-working. He seemed to be a very strong adult figure in her life and she identified with him.

> My father believed in discipline. He strongly believed that education was the key to success in life. He taught us the values of working hard, discipline, and responsibility. My father was a good and strong family man. He highly respected the custom and committed to the land structure in the Marshalls. He was an alab (similar to overseer) by his own rights on his lands. He was a diligent Marshallese farmer, fisherman, and copra maker. He spoke Japanese.

Her family was church oriented and a mission school was the first choice for the children of this family. School was not compulsory in those days so she was nine years old when she began school in the third grade of the Uliga Protestant Christian School (UPCS), the mission elementary school

on Majuro.

> My family moved to Majuro from Jaluit in October of 1957. We came on the MORNING STAR. It was a missionary's boat and the late Rev. Eleanor Wilson was the lady Captain of the boat. The trip was rough and I was very sick with seasickness. Besides the crew, my family were the only passengers on this trip.
>
> In UPCS, my subjects were Marshallese, Reading, Math, Religion, and Music. On my first day in school, I had a mixed feeling of both fright and excitement. It was exciting because I made new friends. On the other hand, I was very terrified because I had never been in school before. However, it didn't take me long to be acquainted with my teachers, classmates, and my studies. I remember the Reverend Eleanor Wilson was my favorite teacher. She taught the spelling and vocabulary. I think she had some impact on my inspiration or dream of becoming a schoolteacher some day.

There were two elementary schools on Majuro then, a Protestant one and a Catholic one. The Protestant UPCS usually had a small Marshallese staff working with a missionary from America or from Germany. The Catholic Assumption Elementary School (AES) usually had a few Mary Knoll Sisters teaching the catholic children. Evelyn's family was actively Protestant, so she attended the UPCS and wondered about the AES.

> While attending UPCS, I wanted to transfer to the Assumption Catholic School. I knew it was better than my school. It had better facilities and more textbooks. Its curriculum was in place and the American sisters taught most of the subjects. But it was difficult to get in Assumption if your family was not Catholic. I remember envying some of the Catholic schoolgirls who are now very educated and happen to be my very good friends. Today, I am so happy that the Catholic Schools in the Marshalls

welcome all qualified students regardless of their family's church.

The mission high school available in Majuro Atoll was too costly for the family and a public high school was available so Evelyn attended the the Marshalls Christian High School (MCHS) in Rongrong across the lagoon for a year and then transferred to the government Marshall Islands High School (MIHS). In the early 1960s, MIHS was finding its way, defining its mission and procedures were not yet in place.

> It was not easy to get into the Marshall Islands High School because there were no official admission procedures, no school counselors to provide assistance for new students. My experience was to convince one of the Marshallese instructors at the school that I was willing to learn. I still don't know what policies and procedures were applied for my admission but all I know is I was lucky to be admitted. I graduated from MIHS in 1968.

Evelyn now had a goal – to pursue further education. There were no counselors or other persons to turn to for assistance and this was a big problem in finding colleges and ways to get to them.

> This was a bad experience and hard to forget. During the summer of 1968, I received a letter of scholarship award from the Yokwe Yuk Women's Club of Kwajalein to pursue my education abroad. I was very thrilled and thankful but I was not yet accepted into any college or university in the United States. I was desperately in need of someone to help me in finding a suitable institution for me. Frankly, there was no one I could seek assistance from. While I was in this state of being helpless, the Trust Territory government was recruiting students to attend the School of Nursing on Saipan

in the Marianas Islands.

Evelyn had no dreams to become a nurse but thought the opportunity as a stepping stone to what she did want.

> I felt I had no choice and accepted. My thought was that after Nursing School I would continue to attend advanced colleges in the United States. I was totally committed to my personal goal of advancing my education.

While attending the Nursing School, Evelyn received a letter informing her that she had been accepted at the MaunaOlu College in Maui, Hawaii, a private college. Her grades at the Nursing School were good but she wanted to attend school in the United States. She gave notice to the Nursing School office that she was transferring to the college on Maui during January 1969.

> I flew on Continental Airlines from Saipan in the Marianas Islands to Honolulu in the Hawaiian Islands. I was very, very frightened and had no ideas of a big city like Honolulu. I stayed one night at the Holiday Inn near the airport and the next morning flew to Maui where I was greeted by the college chancellor. I attended Mauna Olu College and graduated in 1971 with an AA degree in Liberal Arts.

Summer vacations were work times as Evelyn didn't have enough money to return to the Marshall Islands. Instead, she found work with the Maui Pineapple Company as a pineapple cleaner.

> I consider this a unique type of experience because the kind of

> manual work I used to perform in the factory has been replaced by technology. In addition, most pineapple land plantations in the State of Hawaii have been sold to the big development companies. I am happy to have acquired such a skill.

The summer after her graduation from Mauna Olu College in June 1971, she enrolled at the U.S. International University at Point Loma, San Diego, California. She completed a B.A. In Political Science and Economics in in August 1972. Having navigated through the Nursing School on Saipan, the Mauna Olu College on Maui, and the U.S. International University in California, she went home.

> I went home and got married to my wonderful husband and after spending a few weeks in Majuro, we returned to California. I was still pursuing my educational goals. I was accepted as a graduate student and graduated in June of 1974 with an M.A. in Education from Stanford University in California.

It was time to enter the world of work and she returned to the Marshall Islands to do so.

> My first job was teaching at MIHS. I was very excited and proud to rejoin my school as a faculty member. I taught history and government for the eleventh and twelfth grades from 1975 to 1979.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the winds of political change blew in and reinforced the move toward self-determination which was sweeping the Pacific Islands. Triggered by World War II, urged by the United Nations, and embraced by emerging Pacific entities, people of the Marshall Islands

chose to expend much energy, time, and finances to seek their own self-determination.

> There were lots of political debates on the radio, in the local newspaper, and in the outer island communities as well. I was very much involved in those debates, particularly at those issues on the draft constitution of the Marshall Islands and especially its bill of rights. I wanted the Marshallese people to have a democratic constitution with a strong bill of rights. As a result, we have a strong Bill of Rights in our Constitution. I think my involvement and participation in those political debates had a great impact on my next decision which was to run for the Nitijela which is the Parliament of the Marshall Islands. Above all, I was always interested in politics. I ran for Nitijela with lots of support from people, especially the traditional leaders. I became a senator from Jaluit Atoll in 1977.

As the first and only lady senator, Evelyn was very involved in the legislation of laws for the new government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI or REPMAR).

> I know I made great contributions to the Social Security Act and the Educational Act as well as serving on several Nitijela committees. Through the Nitijela, I have a contributed a lot to the economic, social, and political development of Jaluit Atoll, my home atoll which I represented. As once a woman senator, I believe and consider my huge political contributions to my fellow women citizens in this Republic. If I could make it, which I did, I know qualified Marshallese women can make it too.

There has been another elected woman senator and currently is the only woman in the Nitijela. One at a time, women are beginning to make their

mark as decision-makers . Evelyn has had the longest term to date.

> I was a senator for 17 years. I lost the 1995 election. In 1999, I was appointed the RMI ambassador to the Republic of China (ROC).
>
> After an election, the new administration did not carry on this appointment and my role in the government was terminated.

There is life after government service and Evelyn has thoughts about it.

> I am considering working with any school as a supervisor, principal, or other related areas in the field of education when I return to Majuro. I would like to encourage more young women to get into higher and more quality schools in any professional fields. I want to help and to focus in creating some educational programs that will be effective in reducing the high number of pregnancies among teens which is the major factor of female dropout.
>
> I love Honolulu. I like the weather, neither hot nor cold. Just right! I like the way the mountains are naturally arranged. Getting around in this city is very easy because of the public transportation system. The people are friendly. Lots of good opportunity to meet various ethnic groups of people and learn from them about their cultures and their countries. My husband works for Hawaiian Airlines as an Avionics Engineer so Honolulu is our second home. If I stay here in Honolulu, I would like to work in a program to encourage and to support Marshallese in Hawaii to complete high school and continue.

This confident and decided woman was able to earn the first M.A. by a Marshallese woman. Both knowledgeable and competent, she became the first woman to run for elective office in the Nitijela of the new Republic of the Marshall Islands. She has represented her Republic in events as prestigious as the South Pacific Regional Environmental Program meeting

of 1993. She regards her political career as path-breaking and hopes that other Marshallese women will develop their political voices effectively.

An election and a new slate of elected government officials have seen fit to not require the services of any member of her family. Her western self is upset even as she recognizes the political necessity of being out of favor temporarily. Her island self is calm and accepting of this recent turn of events. However, she is looking for a new niche for herself outside of the Republic of the Marshall Island

The Education Department should be one huge extension of the family.

An Interview with Annie deBrum on March 6, 2001

Likiep Atoll is the most Catholic of the Marshall Islands atolls. It is a lovely atoll, self-contained and usually with an abundance of fish and plants. There are dry times as Likiep is in the northern atolls which receive less rain than the southern atolls. Two large families inhabit and own Likiep. Born on Likiep, Annie deBrum remembers her earliest years quite positively.

> I was born on Likiep, the baby of my family. The church was very important on Likiep which was predominantly Catholic with only some Protestants. My family included two sisters and brothers. My mother was from Mejit and usually was very active and busy with her children, cleaning the house, and keeping her children busy. She was always there for us. My father , of Likiep, cared for the family's interests and was the bookkeeper for the deBrum family which had other branches. His work took all his time but he was a strong part of our lives.

She was quite young when the World War II began coming closer and endangered their island and its people. Her family have told her some of what happened.

> Before the war, my older brother and sister were attending Japanese school on Wotje Atoll. When we heard World War II was beginning, our family went to get them. We went by ship and on the return trip my sister was shot. The war came closer and on Likiep the bombs were falling. All the Likiep families ran away to the smaller islands of the atoll where we lived for about three years.

After the war, her personal recollections began upon the family's return to Likiep.

> Back on Likiep, I was old enough to go to Sunday School catechism where I learned stories from our Catholic women. Our family had night prayers regularly and I began my life-long relationship with my church. Our island had nothing after the war but our islanders built the church of Our Lady of Mercy and the school called Holy Rosary School. There were no people to help us; we did everything by ourselves using materials we had available. The buildings were so beautiful. My first school was that Holy Rosary School taught by the Mary Knoll Sisters and by my older sister Cecelia. We learned about religion, mathematics, home economics, handcrafting, and cooking which I did not really like. The small motions of handwork were more satisfying to me.

However, the Holy Rosary School was an elementary school which did not go past the sixth grade. Annie needed to go somewhere else for more schooling.

> The Sisters arranged for me to attend Our Lady of Mercy Convent on Ponape where the Mercedarian Sisters were in residence. I had decided to become a Catholic nun. The first step was to become an aspirant for two years. This was a time of much studying and working activities in very time-structured days. There were about twenty girls in the novitiate at that time. We had to learn to dress like nuns. It was hard work to learn to be a sister on Ponape with Spanish-speaking Mercedarian Sisters! The next step was to function as full sisters – a very regimented life. It was wake-up at 5:00 a.m., then a time of meditation and convent prayers, then breakfast. After the breakfast, we had studies and outreach activities. The needs of our convent were done by us, including construction. There was specific time for each activity of the day. I learned English for the studying, Ponapean for the outreach activities, and Spanish for the Sisters.

Annie became more and more immersed in the Catholic life and her next move was toward more education at a higher level.

> The convent training center was moved from Ponape in the Eastern
>
> Caroline Islands to Saipan in the Marianas Islands. I moved there and attended the Mount Carmel High School until my graduation. The Sisters taught all subjects and as a Sister I graduated and then taught in Mount Carmel. Shortly, I was assigned to teach on Ponape. Sisters were rotated about every two years. For me, it was like home; my contacts with Marshallese became closer as my brother was on a ship between the Marshall Islands and Ponape. I enjoyed the family which was my community of nuns.

The every two years rotation was within the islands of Micronesia and Annie looked forward to the new places and new peoples.

> I was assigned to the convent on Majuro and it was a time for getting re-acquainted with my own people for that next two years. Then the church returned me to Ponape and then re-assigned me to Palau in the Western Caroline Islands where I was to teach in the Maris Stella School. However, the Palauan language was too hard for me to learn!

The re-assignments seemed to be always teaching assignments. When she was again re-assigned to Ponape, she was a teacher and a dormitory supervisor which was an added responsibility for her. After these several assignments within the islands it seemed to be time for more education.

> I was sent to the mainland and St. Mary's College in Kansas City, Kansas. This was a Catholic college for about 400 women. There I stayed the four years necessary to earn my B.A. in Sociology. Another Marshallese was a student there at the same time and that was a good thing for me.

Apparently, becoming a MaryKnoll Sister kept her in Micronesia as her

next assignment was in Truk in the St. Cecelia's grade school. She used every occasion to learn new things and seemed never to be bothered by any homesickness. She did get re-assigned to Majuro on the next rotation.

> Again in Majuro, I was a teaching MaryKnoll Sister. However, when I requested an extension to stay on at Majuro, the request was denied as there was no one else to be roommate with me. At that time, a sister-in-residence had to have a roommate. It was a big decision time. I left the sisterhood feeling that I would and could always be a sister in my heart and serve people for the Lord even if I didn't look like a MaryKnoll Sister anymore.

Life after sisterhood may have been quite a shock but Annie, the ex-sister Annie, worked out a place for herself without losing her commitment to her Lord.

> In 1976, I started working for the government and have continued working in federal programs wherever I could be of service. I worked as a counselor for the CETA program for a few years. A new government scholarship office was to be established and I provided the foundation for it working all by myself for some years. I worked in the federal programs available at the hospital for the children and for the health assistants. My background in sociology was very useful. I also worked in the establishment of the program for the disabled. I was seldom without a position of service to some group of Marshallese.

In reviewing her life as a MaryKnoll Sister and then as an ex-sister, she reasserts her commitment to the core of her life.

> My relationship with God is central to my life and I have no regrets on my decisions to become a sister and then later on to leave the sisterhood. After all, God is still central to my life. I am grateful

> to my family which has always been a can-do family and I feel that I am a can-do person. As long as I am honest with myself in my motivations and actions and concerns, I feel comfortable with my life. I have respect for other people, their decisions, their lives.

She has gathered many pieces of wisdom over the years as a religious and as a civilian and when asked to offer for others, she mentioned:

> One's life is centered with children and the parents should be there for their children in all ways. Our Education Department should be one huge extension of the family, doing their work and realizing that Marshallese children are at the core of the reason for the department's existence.

Annie deBrum was the first Catholic sister from the Marshalls. The youngest in a staunchly Catholic and large land-owning family on Likiep, Annie early wanted to be close to her Lord. She became a nun, a lovely, serene, and composed nun. Her self-confident, self-contained, and very independent self later decided to not remain as a Catholic sister. She became an ex-sister. The government of the Marshall Islands recognized her valuable academic background and employed her talents in its many federal programs. As always, she is capable and self-disciplined, giving more than is required in the service of her Lord – through the medium of government programs.

She is currently caught between her hard-won western education of law and the realities of the Republic of the Marshall Islands political scene.

An Interview with Rosalie Konou on March 4, 2001

Rosalie Konou is attractive with short hair and a determined manner. She speaks quickly and chooses her words with no seeming effort. Born on Jaluit Atoll, she recalls that in her youth, young children lived a free kind of life under the monitoring eyes or relatives and with few natural dangers in their environment. Children played on the beach and swam in the lagoon interacting with ready playmates of siblings and cousins.

> My childhood was full of good times on Jaluit. If I could relive my life, I think I would choose to stay on Jaluit.

Outside the family, school was the door to the world of education. The Protestant Church was a powerful influence on the children in the mission elementary school. School days are remembered:

> The emphases were on the Bible, its stories and meanings. Those long ago studies have helped me make many present-day decisions.

The church harnessed the energies and time of the adults throughout the week and was second only to the time-honored activities of Marshallese.

> My parents were active in the church and I spent many evenings there. On Wednesday, there was a meeting for men and women. On Thursday, there was a meeting for women only, and on Sunday for everyone. We were very church-centered.

The mission school ended at seventh grade but the public elementary school of those years went to the eighth grade so Rosalie experienced the

contrast between the mission and the public elementary schools.

> My family moved from Jaluit to Majuro and I was in the Uliga Protestant Christian (UPCS). I graduated from the seventh grade at UPCS and then from the eighth grade at Rita Elementary School (RES) which was a government public school. It was so different from the church school. There was no prayer before school or singing during the day. Bible studies were not in the curriculum.

There was the Marshalls Christian High School (MCHS) at Rongrong across the lagoon and the Marshall Islands High School (MIHS) at Majuro which was the only public high school of the time. MIHS was an extension of the elementary school and didn't evoke much comment.

> I attended for my ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades. My senior year was quite different. My 1970 senior year I was able to do an American Friends Service (AFS) exchange with a sponsoring family in Wisconsin in the United States. I traveled by myself to Guam where I met other AFS exchange students and we traveled together to Honolulu. We then continued on to our mainland destinations. My Wisconsin family were farmers who worked very hard. That year, unfortunately, my "father" died, leaving his family in sad straits. I moved to live with a family in town which was again different for me. There, school was fun but not easy and I had to develop study skills by myself. The small town in Wisconsin really honored their AFS students. I felt treated like a queen. At graduation time, an MIHS teacher and family I had known during my years at MIHS traveled to be with me. I had a star beside my name on the graduation program. Wisconsin was a strong experience for me.

Rosalie's teen years had been made memorable with the adventure of her traveling outside the Marshall Islands and attending a high school in the United States. She clearly like being an independent person and liked

learning from her changing situations about weather, geography, families, and communities. She expressed much satisfaction in the creation of such a successful experience for herself. That experience fueled her desire to continue with college aspirations and she applied for a scholarship which she received to a college she considered to be third rate.

> I received a scholarship to the University of Guam. I didn't really want to go to Guam because in those days, the University of Guam was not great. However, I did go and stayed for four years in the new dormitories built for the University of Guam. We dorm students were not rich but together we made meals. The meals were rice with jekaroo for breakfast and a can of meat shared for dinner.

Because Guam is in the Marianas Islands, Rosalie was close to Saipan in the Marianas and in a position to seize an opportunity that opened her eyes to the field of law.

> In 1981, I attended a pre-law training summer session on Saipan. Then, I knew I wanted to become a lawyer. Following the session I was able to attend Gonzaga School of Law in Washington State. I was on my way to becoming a lawyer!

It was an exciting time for her when she returned to the Marshall Islands. She was a lawyer, the first Marshallese woman lawyer, and she had a job.

> In 1983, a federal program for Legal Services for Marshallese was established with me as the first Marshallese lady lawyer employed to lay its foundations.

She used her legal training and experience to establish the first office for

legal services to the Marshallese who had heretofore settled their several differrences by traditional procedures or by resorting to an American-run Micronesian Legal Services Corporation operating in the Marshall Islands. Over the first years of operation, there was an increased need for court-determined decisions and the Republic of the Marshall Islands Nitijela funded a Legal Aid Office in 1993. The Republic was taking over former Trust Territory functions and legal aid was seen as necessary so that the Marshallese would have Marshallese recourse to legal action.

> The two offices of federal Legal Aid and RMI Legal Aid were supposed to eventually merge into one but the merger didn't happen. No services are now available and I was terminated in July 2000. The current Republic of the Marshall Islands government does not see a need for my services or for me.

The political scene has changed from the time when the earlier Trust Territory government encouraged and made possible her law school years. The present Republic of the Marshalls denigrates her accomplishments of becoming a lawyer and of being instrumental in founding legal services for the Marshallese within the Marshall Islands . She is wounded by the recent government actions and the wasting of her talents.

> I am now "resting" between governments and feeling rather wasted. That is, my legal training and experiences are going unused. One government signed my papers to send me away for this kind of education and another government has now thrown it away. I'll

> run my small store and see where my legal background can be put to use -- outside, maybe! I continue my legal practice, but now, it is quite expensive for most Marshallese so I seldom find clients. Most people cannot afford lawyers and their costs. I do legal work when people can pay for my services privately.

The first Marshallese woman lawyer is breezy and personable. She was aggressive in the pursuit of her credentials and was determined on behalf of her clients. Both learned and serious in her work as a lawyer and as the establisher of a legal aid service for Marshallese, she has been sidelined by the results of an election. Currently angry, and a little bitter, she is now waiting for her time to become an active lawyer again. The impression of a strong-minded lady persists.

She does not mention the roles of her family in her life decisions. She seems to feel she became a lawyer through her own efforts. However, it was through her family's traditional status as land-owners and the family's connections which made possible her access to the progressive levels of educational opportunities. She is one of three daughters, two of which have earned advanced college degrees. It is also because of her family's status and connections that she is currently out-of-favor with the current government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Training and advanced degrees weigh less than appropriate political involvement. She has made the most of her intelligence, education, and experience but in the current RMI political climate, those credentials are insufficient for her to continue in a productive role as a Marshallese lawyer for the Marshallese in the Marshall Islands.

She remembers fondly her life as an unfettered island child before the strictures of church teachings, government teachers, and journeys abroad turned her eyes in other directions. She remembers the difficulties of the learning and the elation of successful completion. Caught between her hard-won western law education and her nation's political realities, she is waiting it out, island-style.

I do want to return to the Marshall Islands again in the near future. I will look into reconnecting myself with the educational scene in my islands.

An Interview with Hilda Heine in October 2000

This composed and self-confident Marshallese is the first woman to hold an executive position outside of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Hilda Heine was one of ten children born to a minister father and a homemaker mother.

> I was born on Rongrong, one of the larger islands of Majuro Atoll. My father had started one of the first church schools there. The school went up to what we now consider intermediate ages. School attendance was by a selection committee. Church people of different atolls would select children to attend Rongrong.

The churches moved capable persons to where they were needed and a minister's family accompanied him when he assumed new duties.

> We moved a lot but my kemem (first birthday) was held on Rongrong. Then we traveled to Jabwor, an island in Jaluit Atoll where my father was minister and began a school for ministers-in-training. We moved again as my father was next transferred to Imroj, another island in Jaluit Atoll. Here, he became principal of the mission school for grades one to six. The school emphasized Bible, math, and English. The islands also held the main church where my father was the minister.
>
> Everywhere the family went so that my father could serve in church and school, he would raise chickens and pigs and create a garden. He was always busy and saw that his five girls and five boys were also busy with the animals, the garden, and school learning.

She remembered her early years as being always surrounded by books and magazines because her father was always studying for his ministry,

his school, and his church.

> My house was full of things to read and I always knew that reading and learning were important.

She also remembered her early years as being always busy on things to learn at home with her mother.

> My mother offered the stability of being a homemaker always busy with her many children and seeing to the discipline at home. We learned the island customs, how to be tidy, to sew at an early age, to crochet , and to cook. My mother read the Bible in our Marshallese language but didn't have time to do other readings. I remember playing in the roads and swimming, gathering, sewing, and weaving when i was quite young in the sixth or seventh grade.

Her first large school was in her future when her family moved again to the island of Majuro in the Majuro Atoll.

> I attended Rita Elementary School (RES) in the eighth grade. RES was a public school and larger than I had known before. I first heard English spoken by a native speaker of English. I stayed with my sister near RES but for the tenth and eleventh grades of high school I stayed in the dormitory at the Marshall Islands High School (MIHS).

A new government-sponsored program became an opportunity for a few Marshallese students. The program was to see how island youth could handle stateside school environments. A group of high school students from Truk participated in the same program.

> During my eleventh year I was selected with four other Marshallese boys to attend a senior year in Oregon. This

> program gave the students their first plane ride and then they ended up in Cottage Grove, Oregon. I and another Marshallese boy wound up in Cottage Grove; the other students were being sponsored by other families in other locations.
>
> My Oregon family had two boys and one girl. I stayed with them my whole senior year. It was a time of many adjustments to the climate which was cold and to people who spoke English only. Conversations were often about unfamiliar ways. I had already had a great deal of English in my background and it was a matter of practicing the spoken English.

She remembers her Oregon time as being busy at school as a foreign student and busy at home as a second daughter in a strange family.

> I had the responsibility of only a little cleaning and I became a second daughter in a lower middle-class family. The family did not push for learning and it was years later that I discovered that my Oregon father was not really literate. My Oregon mother had been the family communicator. I am still in occasional contact with my Oregon sister.

Hilda graduated from Cottage Grove High School and then faced some major decisions.

> I returned to the Marshall Islands briefly before flying away again. This time I went to the University of Oregon in Eugene. This was a difficult decision as my father became ill and might not be there upon my return. However, my father supported and encouraged me to continue college work and my family wanted me to stay in college also. Realistically, I went and my father passed on that fall leaving a large hole in my life and a determination to finish.

Attending the University of Oregon was another new experience as she was away from any family presence.

> I stayed in a dorm for a year, then off-campus with some friends. I think that's a good progression to follow: staying in a dorm helps to make friends of all kinds and learn to cope with the American culture. It was important to get out of my personal comfort zone and push myself. At that time there were only a few Marshallese in the area. They would get together for holidays and talk in their language and eat their own foods. This was actually difficult to do as students were almost all poor and couldn't afford much travel or many social occasions.

Hilda did not seem to allow herself much fun as she was serious about making the most of her opportunity to attend college.

> The farthest I went was to Seattle, Washington, and to California. Both transportation and communications were expensive and as a student I had to budget carefully and avoid frivolous happenings. In those days a student couldn't work because student visas didn't permit working and thus augmenting resources. To stretch my money, I mad myself inaccessible to distractions and focused on what I was doing and learning. The rare occasions of my own student days are now taken for granted by a new generation of Marshallese students. Marshallese students now mix with many other Marshallese and other cultures. They get confused about what is proper Marshallese youth activities – as I knew them.

Her personal life includes a son and a daughter. She wants her children to understand their own culture and maintain it. She wants them to feel comfortable and able to function wherever they are.

> My son is very Marshallese because we came to Honolulu when he was in the seventh grade and he already had his Marshalleseness in place. My daughter is not as knowing about Marshallese as she came to Honolulu when she was in the second grade and did not have as much socialization to her Marshallese self. She experiences some confusion. My son is comfortable in both worlds but my

> daughter is not. I would like to turn around the confusion for her so that she would be more comfortable in her Marshalleseness.

Hilda regularly addresses this cultural discrepancy in her private life.

> The strength of the culture comes from the family and I reinforce at every opportunity the Marshallese way to do things. Schools should make culture understandable but not teach culture as a subject. Exposure to western goods and equipment makes life easier not necessarily better. Kids only know what they wee so their knowledge of American culture is superficial and narrow which can be quite bad.

When asked about problems, there seemed to be only a few major problems during her college years.

> Mostly money. I remember never having enough money except for necessities. I wanted to finish being a student and being poor all the time. Another problem was that of distraction. There were temptations and distractions but my strategy was to avoid them. I knew where I wanted to go. I had my priorities and my focus was school. I worked hard and I was very goal-oriented to accomplish what I wanted.

She credits her family's early expectations of her as a good foundation for the habits she needed during her education journey.

> When I was little there were always things to do around my home, such as cleaning and cooking. I learned early that work was quite necessary. Our family always had chickens, pigs, and a garden. I learned early about production as an outcome of work. My mother was always busy and my father was never still. I grew up with their good examples in front of me. Those were good habits to keep me focused in college.

Replenishing those family contacts was a possibility for students who

were away on a scholarship because if a student satisfactorily completed the thirty credits, there was a paid ticket home. A strong incentive to study. Visits home included working and Hilda worked as a waitress in a downtown store owned by one of her relatives. Visits stimulated the rethinking of goals for the next educational adventure.

> I thought I wanted to be a nurse but mathematics and science were quite heavy for me and I went more and more towards education. Student teaching was a big stumbling block for me. I wanted to do it in the Marshall Islands but I had to be monitored in Oregon. A junior high school in Eugene was my first encounter with live students. I was very nervous and haven't been so nervous since. It was quite funny in retrospect. I had to wipe my face often and go to the restroom to put water on my hot face often. My master teacher seemed to understand my distress. I can do anything now! I student-taught one social studies class and did school monitoring things. As a student teacher, I did the jobs the other "real " teachers didn't want to do.

Hilda returned to the Marshall Islands to begin her work in the islands education system

> I returned to the Marshall Islands High School (MIHS) and taught studies for one year. Then I went to Hawaii and the University of Hawaii at Manoa for one and a half years to get my M.A. In Education, Curriculum and Instruction. UH was similar to the University of Oregon academically and much pleasanter in its climate. I lived in a cluster apartment in the old Vancouver House. It was a good move for me. I have been associated with education in the Marshall Islands ever since.

Hilda has survived the good times and the bad. She knows other

Marshallese students can do it but they need to ask for help.

> This is sometimes hard for Marshallese students to do. They can approach me even when I'm busy. I do take time for students. These days, many students need help. They bring their families with them and everything becomes more difficult as they try to cope with a different climate, needs for money, supplemental employment, the rigors of school and studying, the observing of times and schedules – all new concepts to a Marshallese student. It's a crossroads of decision for students. Some just drop out.

A question about the future of education in the Marshall Islands brought out a relevant comment based upon her own experiences.

> There's no real data for comparison as yet. There seems to be some progress in terms of numbers of students in schools and numbers of graduating students. Improvements need to be by the family, the community supports and expectations.

The question about her future in education in the Marshall Islands had a thoughtful comment.

> Even though I am in the Marshall Islands rather frequently, I have begun to feel disconnected from Marshall Islands affairs. It may be generational as I am getting older and the students younger. It may be that the educational areas in the Marshall Islands of these days represent a larger range than basic education. It may be that the officials in education are changing in ways unfamiliar tome.

While acknowledging her Marshallese ancestry and interdependence on her family members, Hilda radiates independence and confidence in herself. Physically small, she currently holds a high-ranking position

within a regional organization concerned with continuing the United States educational efforts for Pacific peoples. No stranger to executive positions, she has functioned effectively as the President of the College of the Marshall Islands and as the Secretary to the Ministry of Education. A strong and focused administrator, she sees two long-term goals for herself: to complete her Ph.D. work now in progress and to return to the Republic of the Marshall Islands in the near future.

Organizational skills serve her well as she juggles a highly-demanding position with a personal pursuit of academic advancement, two school-aged children, her family ties in Hawaii and elsewhere, and keeps current with happenings in the Marshall Islands. Her strong sense of personal integrity, duty towards commitments, and obligations towards others have brought her to this point in her life. She aims herself towards a goal, focuses her priorities, and unleashes considerable energy to accomplish it.

Along the way, she has authored a study on overpopulation in the Marshall Islands and co-authored a provocative book on education in collaboration with Father Francis X. Hezel.

My mother wanted me to stay home

and help her and become like her.

An Interview with Amenta Matthew on March 6, 2001

This Marshallese woman presents herself in two ways. On one hand, she is a very private person with a family to consider. On the other hand she is a very political person with a high-level position in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Her memories highlight a time which is in contrast to her life today.

Amenta Matthewwas born on Rongrong, the Laura end, where her parents were teachers with the Rongrong Christian High School. She was the middle child of six boys and three girls.

> My childhood was full of work: collecting, picking up, cleaning, caring for five younger brothers. It was also full of swimming as every chance I had I jumped into the water!

Both teaching parents were involved at the school in other ways too: her father as a carpenter around the church and her mother as the organist in the church.

> I grew up in a school environment and learned my alphabet just being around all the students. I had not yet attended school as a student. Christmas was a big celebration for us and one year my relative was at our Rongrong with us for Christmas and asked to take me to Ebeye in the Kwajalein Atoll for a year. I remember traveling by canoe to board the Morning Star mission ship, going to Aur Atoll where my grandmother was getting old, and then continuing on to Ebeye where I stayed until 1963.

Ebeye is one of the islands of the Kwajalein Atoll.It serves as a bedroom

community for several hundred islanders who work at Kwajalein, a United States missile base. Because of Ebeye's proximity to the missile base, its people and its rules, its goods and its services, Ebeye has become different from the other Marshall Islands.

> Ebeye was a strange world to me and everything was unfamiliar. I couldn't do my favorite activity of swimming and I didn't know anyone at all. The Ebeye Protestant mission school was my first school and I attended from 1959 until 1963. I mainly taught myself the reading and writing, the Bible and English. At that time, Ebeye teachers were really strict and I was demoted from second grade to first grade for some small mistake in spelling. Ebeye stands out in my memory for that!

When her time with the relatives on Ebeye was finished, Amenta was returned to her Majuro family and a Majuro school. This time she went to the Uliga Protestant Christian School (UPCS). She liked this school and began to think about being a teacher when she grew up.

> There was a Protestant High School called Mizpah in Truk and I had the opportunity to go there for my high school years. I lived in a dormitory where I met other girls from other parts of Micronesia . I discovered a strong liking for the sciences and then decided to become a science teacher.

The Protestant Church encouraged students to go abroad as exchange students and recruited Protestant families to host them. An arrangement through the church provided Amenta with a high school year abroad.

> My senior year was spent in Vermont, church-sponsored by a

family there. The sponsoring family traveled to Honolulu and I

traveled to Honolulu from the Marshalls. We met there and continued on to Vermont. My sister had arranged the meeting in Honolulu. I lived with the family as their daughter and learned about a different kind of life and cold weather. The family was so good and wanted to take me places but I usually didn't feel very adventuresome. I had a few friends and stayed to myself a lot. I especially remembered the embarrassment of"recital". My Vermont family had arranged piano lessons for me. I learned a little; then came recital time. I didn't know the meaning and was surprised to find many people waiting to hear the students' pieces. My teacher was a little old lady who lived in a house full of old antiques and the piano for the lessons. It was a time which sticks in my mind.

The church arrangement included returning to Mizpah for graduation. Then it was time to consider a college for her plan of training to become a science teacher.

I applied for and received a Trust Territory scholarship with which I attended a Christian college, Defiance, in Ohio. There, I met my husband. We were two of the four Marshallese at that college. No coed dorms existed then so we were in two different dorms. My interest in science grew stronger and I majored in the natural sciences. Our money seemed to be enough because we didn't need much as students. I worked some weekly hours in the school library for additional money.

The Trust Territory scholarships of those days allowed a return trip to "home" after a successful completion of two years study.

I took my trip home for a vacation. But I was ready to return and finish my college studies. My father was very supportive of my efforts and at times my older brother would help me financially. My mother just wanted me to stay home and help her and become

like her.

Amenta had enjoyed her college years and she fully expected to use her training and function as a science teacher when she returned to the Marshall Islands. Her future was to be otherwise as her first job proved.

> The nineteen seventies were years of political transition and a newly-formed Political Status Commission needed a college-trained person. I became that person, secretary to that body and I have a continued to be secretary to the entity of the emerging Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). Now I am a high-level secretary, the Clerk of the Cabinet of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The Republic began as a parliamentary body and Amenta became its first Clerk of the Cabinet. She became a political being, continued to work as the Clerk amidst the most powerful men in the parliament, the Ministers of the ten departments in the executive branch of government.

> I just do my job quietly and try to treat everyone the same. I never take sides and I never talk about what I do, Secrets are safe with me.

The personal life is another side. She keeps her two worlds well apart.

> I have four children. There are two older ones and two younger ones still in elementary school. I'm still a quiet person, preferring to read and to be with my family. I don't join any of the many groups or many activities available to women these days.

Having worked for three elected presidents of the Republic and with

their appointed cabinets, she has established procedural foundations and is happy with her work. She is also beginning to think of stopping. Amenta has qualities essential to her present position; self-contained, capable, reliable, competent, and trustworthy. Tall and slim, she is attractively elegant and continues as a lady of discretion. She stands out in a society where women do almost everything in some group or other. She has little desire to be seen as a groupie.

This role model for young Marshallese women is one of the outstanding women of the Marshall Islands today (Green 1987:167).

An Interview with Marie Maddison on March 2, 2001.

Highly educated and much interviewed, this lady was born in Majuro and has become a driving force for the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Marie Maddison remembers her early years with gratitude to her family.

The family sent her to Catholic Assumption Elementary School (AES) in Majuro, and then to Mount Carmel High School on Saipan in the Marianas Islands where she graduated as class valedictorian in 1969.

> I credit my family and my Catholic Church for their support and encouragement as I went through the Catholic education system. They also made it possible for me to attend St. Mary's College in Leavenworth, Kansas, in the United States.

After earning her B.A. in English in 1973, she returned to the Marshalls and embarked on a ten-year career with education. A woman of few words about herself, she has little time for small talk but she has accumulated an impressive list of positions held and accomplishments recognized.

Always looking forward, she was first a teacher at the Assumption High School (AHS) which had opened while she was away and Trust Territory Teacher of the Year. As a specialist for a federal Adult Basic Education program, she was involved with the education of children and adults from that time onward. In 1979, the Republic of the Marshall Islands emerged as a constitutional government and Marie successfully negotiated a series

of careers as a high official in the developing government. As the first chairperson of the three-member Public Service Commission (PSC) she laid the foundations for civil service employment in the new Republic while overseeing policies and regulations governing public service emloyees until 1982.

As Secretary for the Ministry for Social Services, she created firm guidelines for the various social groupings served by the Ministry. She organized several important projects for women in the skills essential to midwifery, leadership, small business enterprises. Doing more and more for women, she spearheaded a Credit Union for women and initiated a National Women's Coordinating Committee which has spawned the National Women's Organization.

As Secretary for the Ministry of Health Services, she focused on women's concerns and promoted women's health through workshops, health clinics, and the existing women's clubs. She served as Secretary of Education and as Director of Planning, Research, and Development for the College of the Marshall Islands.

Marie is the most experienced of all the Ministry Secretaries currently putting her acumen to work as the Secretary of Foreign Affairs. She has

always been concerned with women's issues and has been instrumental in the developing of women's groups for non-traditional purposes and for participation in all areas of island living. She promotes women's rights and interests within the government structures and within the community. Her greatest satisfactions lie in the realm of women's affairs. She was the first woman to hold an executive position in the Republic. An analyzer and an initiator, she doesn't talk much about herself. She's busy with the concerns of the RMI.

DISCUSSION

Except for Mary who set an example of achievement for women, the Marshallese women of this study were the first to graduate with degrees from western institutions of higher education. Different factors contributed to their educational achievement.

From the study interviews, the backgrounds of the women revealed several common features. There were similarities in their experiences through their gender, their mothers and fathers, their families and daily lives, their churches and religiosity, their access to mobility and education.

As females in their matrilineal society, the women were secure within the family lineage. No matter where they went or how far away they traveled, they belonged in their clan, lineage, family and the Marshallese Islands. They had roots.

As conveyors of cultural continuity, the mothers of the women passed on their knowledge of traditional ways, genealogies, and land rights to their daughters. As heads of their families, the fathers were good providers and living models of productive males involved in traditional customs and church activities.

The women mentioned the foundation and strength of their families which gave them a reassuring sense of identity and security. There was also a sense of pride in their families' land holdings, observations of customs, and church involvement. The families supported their daughters with child care and with whatever financial assistance they could manage.

At an early age, their mothers and fathers expected their children to share in the daily processes of living and worshipping. Nothing comes easily in subsistence living and every day brought challenging tasks. As youngsters, the women became quite accustomed to living with challenges. They understood that to get something, you often had to do something or go somewhere else. Travel was purposeful because of war, training for occupations, some occupational transfers, schooling. The girls learned to adapt to new places, faces, and situations at young ages.

In the Marshalls, the women attended mission elementary schools which emphasized religion and a life of hard work which included commitment to a larger community. They had constant immersion in the precepts of western Christendom through their homes, their churches and their schools. Away from the Marshall Islands, the women added western secular and material perspectives to their lives.

While their backgrounds and experiences were similar in some respects, the women diverged from each other as they matured and as the Marshallese Islands evolved from being a part of an American Trust Territory to the self-governing nation it is today.

The oldest woman, Mary, came from a well-known Protestant family. Her English language skills were extraordinary for her time. She became the first island woman to teach in Protestant mission schools, the translator of English texts for the navy teacher training schools, and when a Women's Interests Office was initiated, she was in place to become the first woman to head an office in the Marshalls.

Carmen followed a different path as the first Marshallese recipient of a scholarship to the University of Hawaii and the first woman to earn a B.A. She returned to the Marshalls at the time when federal programs became available. When she took charge of the first Adult Basic Education (ABE) program, she found she had a natural flair for leadership in the community activities. Carmen served as the only female elected to the early Congress of Micronesia, honed her political skills and was appointed the first Secretary of Internal and Outer Island Affairs for the Republic.

Evelyn was the first woman to earn the M.A. degree. One of the first

women to receive a TTPI scholarship and assistance, she persevered through four universities and a teaching stint before the political arena opened for her. She pursued her interest in politics and was the first woman to be elected as a member for the parliament of her country. She served her constituents from Jaluit and made major contributions to her nation through her work on several committees and through traveling to conferences abroad.

Marie attended a Catholic college abroad and was schooled during the turbulent 1960s in the United States. She returned to the Marshalls with a personal commitment to women's issues and concerns at a time when the Marshall Islands was in its formative stages as a nation. First, as a teacher, and then as the establisher of public service procedures for the emerging government, she continued her career with a string of Secretarial positions and is totally identified with the RMI government and the Catholic Church.

One of two Marshallese Catholic sisters, Annie persisted in her life as a teaching sister for many years. She is identified with her church and still is even though she opted to leave her religious order. Annie re-entered secular status at the time when many new federal programs became available to the new Republic. Her niche is serving her God through the programs which serve her people.

The first woman lawyer was Rosalie who returned to the Marshalls at the time when western-style legal aid was becoming important. Islanders whose understanding of their traditional ways was in conflict with western legal tactics needed someone with knowledge of both systems to untangle their problems. Other Marshallese lawyers have returned but Rosalie remains the lone female lawyer in the Marshalls.

Education has always been a part of Hilda's life. She is identified with her Protestant church through her well-known and respected antecedents and with various areas of education through her work. Her strong organizational skills and goals have seen her through her roles of teacher, President of the College of the Marshall Islands, Secretary of the Depatment of Education for RMI, and an executive for the Honolulu-based Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL).

Amenta is identified with her well-known Protestant family and with the RMI government. Her excellent English skills and low-key personality have been appropriate for the two major positions she held with the government. First, as secretary to the Political Status Commission (PSC) during the process of self-determination, and then, as the Clerk of the Cabinet to the parliament of the new Republic. Both those positions were the first of their

kind.

These women obtained their advanced education during the years of the American rule. One girl received a private scholarship; three went abroad under church sponsorships, and three had TTPI scholarships. They learned about non-traditional occupations for women and trained for professions which were new to the women and to the Marshall Islands.

Although their education was enhanced during the American years, their lives were anchored by the three fundamental and powerful influences of family, culture, and church.

The women were privileged to be born into prominent families which facilitated their success. They learned that loyalty to their extended families is primary; each one had functions within the family and also responsibilities to each other. The members took care of each other and were sources of encouragement and support.

The women were born into a culture which assured them land rights to some part(s) of the Marshall Islands. They learned that allegiance to their traditional leaders was obligatory; each one owed respect to the traditional order in their island lives.

The women were born into the church of their families which provided a

firm Christian moral foundation. They learned to worship a power beyond themselves; each one had responsibilities to other people through church groups, and church-sponsored community activities. Their contributions to their church were in the forms of regular attendance, money, food, volunteer work. The church offered a future acceptable to God, culture, and family. The church encouraged education and offered sponsorships to obtain it.

The three major influences of family, culture, and church engendered the attributes of responsibility, loyalty, self-discipline, allegiance, obligation, respect, morality, caring, volunteering, and foresight in these women. The women earned their educational degrees. Their lives had provided them with the attributes they needed to achieve success in their choices.

An unexpected finding was the impact of their fathers on their decisions. Even though the women spent most of their daily time in the company of their female relatives, the women listened to their fathers. Fathers gave major encouragement to going-away daughters; the fathers of these women wanted education for their daughters. Education meant better jobs and more status for the family as well as the possibility of hiring other members of the family.

A distinct sense of self permeates the words of these women as they characterize themselves today: I need to always be an example to the women

(Mary); I am always teaching (Carmen); I am myself wherever I am (Evelyn); I can serve the Lord in many ways (Annie); I am wasting myself (Rosalie); I like being my quiet self (Amenta); I feel disconnected by distance (Hilda); I am always looking to see what can be done for women (Marie).

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